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## THE UNITED STATES AND LATIN AMERICA

*By John F. Moors, LL.D., Senior Member, Moors and Cabot, Bankers; President, Boston Associated Charities*

This country entered the Spanish War primarily to help Cuba, though there were savage cries of "Remember the *Maine*" and certain sensational newspapers were doing their best to shove us into the war. We came out of the Spanish war still trying to help Cuba and determined that our promise to her of independence would be kept.

The diplomats of the old world ridiculed our virtuous professions at the time. Theodore Roosevelt, speaking at Christiania, Norway, in 1910, told how these diplomats poked fun at him, assuring him that these virtuous promises would be broken and he, insistent usually that insult should be resisted, accepted the jibes without offense, so habituated was everyone to the scandalous standards then prevalent in international diplomacy. In his autobiography, published in 1913 he wrote:—

We had explicitly promised to leave the island of Cuba, had explicitly promised that Cuba should be independent. When the promise was made, I doubt if there was a single ruler or diplomat in Europe who believed that it would be kept. As far as I know, the United States was the first power which, having made a promise, kept it in letter and spirit.

Unfortunately, half a century before the war with Spain, we had waged war from motives, which might easily be interpreted as ignoble, with Mexico and, defeating her, despoiled her of half her territory. This event sank deep into the minds, not only of Mexico, but of all Latin America. The "Colossus of the North" was feared and, because feared, was hated. Our habitual contempt for the revolution-torn Latin-American republics blinded our eyes to this hatred and accentuated it because it bred lack of caution and derisive nicknames.

Then, at the very moment when we kept our promises to Cuba, we took Porto Rico—took it from Spain but without consulting the Porto Ricans. Soon afterwards, in 1903, we “took” Panama. It did not belong to us. It belonged to Colombia. And we set up the plea that Colombia was anti-social, that her leaders were “mountain bandits,” that we had a mandate from civilization to take what did not belong to us. President Roosevelt in October, 1903, drafted a letter to Congress proposing that we take Panama by force. At 6.00 p.m., November 3, there was a skillfully prepared revolution on the Isthmus. Our warships prevented the Colombians from attempting to suppress it. We recognized the new Republic of Panama November 6. We promised to place all countries, including this country, on a parity in the payment of tolls for using the canal. In the administration of Mr. Taft we undertook to exempt our own coastwise trade from these tolls. The Wilson administration righted this wrong but so far has sought vainly to persuade Congress to vote \$25,000,000 to Colombia for the property taken from her.

Latin-America followed these events with keener interest than we followed them. When Secretary Root, on a mission of good-will, went to South America in 1906 he spoke excellently at Rio de Janeiro. But the people of South America were suspicious, applying to us as to all men the injunction: “By their deeds shall ye know them.”

The fall of the Diaz régime in Mexico, the accession and murder of Madero, the usurpation by Huerta, the long and bloody revolution, the agitation in this country for intervention, our interest in our big investments in Mexico, the development of rich oil fields there, the seizure of Vera Cruz and the Pershing expedition have increased the dread of us in Latin America and have made the Monroe Doctrine seem more a danger than a protection.

Today a new, brief and comparatively bloodless revolution has caused a new change in the kaleidoscope and brought with it new problems.

President Wilson’s address at Mobile in October, 1913, his efforts to befriend Mexico during the early years of the

long revolution, his refusal to be stampeded into war with Mexico in 1916 were cheering incidents in the almost endless story of distrust resulting from the fear of aggression. The A. B. C. Conferences in 1916, futile though they proved, were evidence of the good-will in Latin-America when assured of our respect and friendliness.

It is a sad commentary on our influence that the further the Latin-Americans are from us the happier they seem to be. Chile and the Argentine are not only prospering but, when they were on the verge of war with each other, they settled their difference by a conference, instead of by force, and they melted their engines of death and built of them a great statue to Jesus Christ and today the Christ of the Andes on a mountain summit three miles above the level of the sea, still commemorates that great achievement.

Mexico, on the other hand, is perpetually in hot water. And we are always talking about her and threatening her and despising her and investing in her riches. When we have invested, we have too often insisted that the only sound course is to "clean her up." It has become the law and the gospel with strong nations that their citizens and their citizens' property shall be protected, by fire and sword, if need be, wherever such citizens and their property may be. The conception that our citizens entrust their persons and their property at their own risk to the laws and conditions in weak and unsettled countries is widely looked upon as unsound and ignoble. Yet the transition from protecting our innocent citizens, to protecting our all too aggressive citizens, to championing their cause without much regard for the standards of unknown races is not only an easy transition but one which may be fraught with injustice, bullying, violence, and finally with the assessment of damages and the acquisition of the weak nation's property.

The official attitude in recent years of the United States toward Mexico has been admirable and was the precursor of that new diplomacy which found a fitting embodiment in the fourteen points. But during these same years the attitude of many influential Americans toward Mexico has been irritating in the extreme. The admirable official attitude

has been despised by most men of education. The exasperating attitude of threats and contempt has been accepted as the proper attitude. Vast, fundamental issues are today involved in what we think and do in regard to Mexico. The problems are at our very door. We cannot escape them. Shall we be a kind friend and neighbor, not officious, but ready to help when we are asked to help, respecting her and her rights, using reason, not force, simply because we are superior in the latter, patient, unselfish, with all the virtues which we profess in our religion? Or shall we throw all these to the winds and think first of our interests present and prospective in Mexico, and, knowing our strength, use it for selfish aims, leading our young men to slaughter other young men and forcing America again to fail the world when moral leadership is most needed?

These questions should be approached, not impatiently or scornfully or selfishly, but respectfully, discreetly, and with faith in men however outwardly unlike ourselves.